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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
September 23, 1975

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Outlook for Lebanon

Efforts to achieve a more durable cease-fire are continuing, but the situation in Beirut and elsewhere is still too fluid to predict its outcome with confidence. Syria's active intercession to limit the conflict, the cooperative attitude of the less radical fedayeen organizations, and Lebanon's past history suggest that some short-term compromise may still be possible. Such a compromise might evolve along the lines of the Muslim community's effort to obtain a commitment from the major religious and political leaders to discuss constitutional reforms, a device that would not imply a basic change in the structure of the government. The situation will remain chronically unstable, however, as long as Lebanon's conservative Christian leadership continues to resist some shift of the political center of gravity toward enhanced power for the Muslims and a revision of the 1943 national covenant on which Lebanon's government is based. The future of the covenant has been at the root of the current trouble and the situation in Lebanon already has deteriorated to the point where communal antagonisms now directly threaten the viability of the country's traditional governing system.

Maintaining a cease-fire probably will depend primarily on continued cooperation between the Lebanese security forces and the Palestine Liberation Organization on the one hand and on restraint by the Christian Phalangist militia on the other.

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Muslim Prime Minister Karami, fearful of sharp fedayeen and leftist reaction, will probably continue to oppose the use of the army. Preserving any cease-fire, however, will be complicated by several factors.

- The extent of control exercised by the major religious and political leaders over their armed followers is by no means clear.

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- Lebanese leftists and fedayeen radicals, especially Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, probably believe that continued strife will eventually overturn the present system of government and pave the way for a Muslim, leftist-dominated regime more sympathetic to them.
- Radical Arab governments, notably Iraq and Libya, are sure to increase their financial and military support to dissident groups and to promote subversive activities.

If the government is successful in restoring a modicum of public order, Karami probably will stay on as prime minister as long as he has Syrian backing. Karami, however, has lost some stature because of the disorder in his home base of Tripoli. His opposition to Christian Interior Minister Shamun's call to use the army to end the fighting in Beirut has strained their relations and may inhibit their future cooperation. President Franjiyah, who was forced to accept Karami, is a shrewd politician who can be expected to attempt to exploit any disunity in the six-man "salvation" cabinet to diminish Karami's influence. Franjiyah, however, has played almost no role in the current crisis and there have already been calls for his resignation before his term expires in 1976. Despite his losses, Karami still appears to retain the political initiative and the support of the principal Muslim leaders, as well as PLO head Yasir Arafat. The latter has emerged as an even greater power in Lebanese domestic politics; his forces, in fact, proved indispensable as mediators during the trouble in Tripoli.

Karami obviously will be preoccupied with the internal security problem even if a cease-fire should take hold. His immediate political task will be to consider the possible expansion of the cabinet, begin some discussion of the social and political demands of the Muslim/leftist camp, and, possibly, Lebanese-fedayeen relations. It is highly unlikely that basic progress could be made on these intractable issues very soon. In any attempt to expand the cabinet, for example, he will have to contend with the demands of the Phalangist leader Pierre Jumayyil and Lebanese socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt for representation of their conflicting interests. An effort to form a cabinet that excluded either Jumblatt's or Jumayyil's representatives, however, could touch off a new round of violence.

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Threat to the Traditional Governing System

If the fighting continues, civil unrest could grow to the point that either Christian--or more likely--Muslim political groups would withdraw their support for the power-sharing principle underlying the national covenant and seek complete power for themselves. The leaders of Lebanon's large Sunni Muslim community have in the past felt that their best interests were served by supporting the national covenant. They are now faced with a critical decision: whether to stick with the known but limited advantages of the present system or to overturn the system in the uncertain hope of winning unlimited advantages.

It is clear that the Muslims will press for reforms which would gain them at least parity with the Christians, but there is no convincing evidence as yet that they are prepared to risk open civil war to challenge the present system.

Potential for Syrian Intervention

Syria has emerged as the principal arbiter of Lebanese domestic politics, but so far Damascus has played a cautious mediating role. Instead of taking sides, the Syrians have gingerly sought to coax the various Muslim and Christian forces to accept a political solution to restore calm. During the latest crisis, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam proposed sending Syrian forces to patrol the streets of Beirut, but this was clearly a political rather than a military threat. Damascus seems more concerned at present with its own problems, particularly the outlook for negotiations over the Golan Heights. Moreover, the Syrians are reluctant to intervene more directly in Lebanon for fear of providing the Israelis with an excuse to occupy southern Lebanon and thus embroil Syria in major hostilities with Israel. Although the Syrians have strong irredentist pretensions, President Asad probably would not want to add to his political burdens at this time by attempting to occupy any Lebanese territory.

It has generally been assumed that Syria would intervene if the Lebanese army were to become engaged and threaten to defeat the fedayeen or drive them from Lebanon. Given the demoralized state of the Lebanese army and the capability of the heavily armed fedayeen to sustain urban warfare for some time, even against the combined forces of the army and the

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Christian militias, it seems highly unlikely that the situation would reach this point. If Syria intervened at all, it would most likely take the form of allowing or encouraging larger numbers of fedayeen forces and arms to cross from Syria into Lebanon (as happened during the May 1973 clashes between the fedayeen and the army). It would also mass some forces on the Lebanese border in order to intimidate the Lebanese army and to force a compromise on the warring parties. While it is possible that Syria would intervene more actively in the event of an all-out civil war in Lebanon, Damascus' caution thus far suggests that the Syrians would not resort to full military intervention unless the Israelis moved into Lebanon first.

Potential for Israeli Intervention

The rise to power in Lebanon of a radical government sympathetic to Syria would be seen in Tel Aviv as a major threat to Israel's security. If that government allowed its territory to be used for a significant increase in terrorist operations, it would invite a heavy Israeli military response and open support of Lebanese Christian dissidents that could threaten renewed general hostilities.

The Israelis could ultimately respond to Syrian intervention in Lebanon or an actively hostile government in Beirut by occupying a portion of southern Lebanon. Although both Lebanon and Israel have in recent years seemed to regard their border as beyond reasonable dispute, hardliners in Israel have for years pointed out that Israel, by seizing territory up to the Litani River, would gain a more defensible border and a greater supply of water. In all likelihood, however, Israel would not seize part of Lebanon unless it were prepared for other reasons to renew hostilities with Syria.

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Roles of Libya and Iraq

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Libya has been actively backing radicals in Lebanon, in an effort to fuel factional fighting, since early 1974.

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their Islamic zeal will lead them to further involvement so long as there is heavy Christian influence in Lebanon.

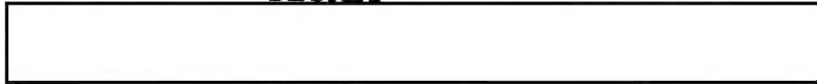
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convinced that Iraq is deeply involved in the current disturbances.

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